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Make-overs from Coats and Suits

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Search your closets for old clothes with a future. Pull discarded woolens out of moth balls, and if you can't use them as they are, remake them into smart outfits.

The needs of our fighting forces limit cloth and clothes for civilians. By putting idle garments to work, you reduce demands for new goods... help to keep down prices... and have more money in the family purse to invest in War Bonds.

MAKE-OVERS FROM COATS AND SUITS

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Before you make over old clothes, be sure—
FIRST, that you can't use the old garment
"as is."

SECOND, that the cloth in the old coat or suit
is worth the time and effort to remake it.

THIRD, that you've had enough sewing experience. Making a wool garment is usually not a
job for a beginner.

Then remember that any garment can be a challenge to remake, but some will tax your wits more than others.

Size Up the Old Garment

As first step, hold the cloth up to strong light and look for holes and thin places. Notice especially elbows, sleeve and hem edges, seat and knees of trousers.

As next step, ask yourself:

★ How much of the garment can I use?

★ Can worn spots be avoided in cutting, or mended so they won't show?

★ What is the fabric in the old garment best suited for—jumper... snow suit... coat? Who in the family needs new clothing most?

In deciding, consider the weight and texture of the cloth. Soft, lightweight suitings make good tailored dresses, jumpers, or suits for children. Coarser wools are better for skirts, women's suits, jackets, or children's coats. Heavy fabrics in men's overcoats are usually best for winter coats, snow suits, mackinaws, and the like.

Now notice the style, cut, and size of the old garment. These will tell you how much goods you have to work with.

For example, a man's two-trouser suit with double-breasted coat gives you more cloth and so a wider choice of pattern than a single-breasted coat with one pair of trousers. A sport coat with patch pockets is likely to give you fewer make-over problems than a coat with bound pockets and deep cut-out waist darts.

And when you're considering size, keep in mind the size of the new garment as well as the old. For example, if you're remaking a man's size 42 suit for a size 32 woman, your choice of new garment and pattern will probably be different than if you're remaking the garment for a much larger woman.

Rip—Wash—Press

Rip the entire garment. Don't try to use part of a garment—for example, a coat front—as it is. Better to do the job right from the start and save disappointment later.

Quickest way to rip stitching is with an old razor blade, but handle the blade skillfully or you may cut your material. Safest way to rip is to pull the stitching thread on one side of the seam, break it off, then pull the loose stitching thread on the other side of the seam, break it off, and so keep on until the seam is ripped.

Save all good buttons, tapes, paddings, and lining materials.

Prepare wool for washing by scraping lint and fuzz from inside folds; by picking off loose threads; by removing spots and stains; and by repairing holes. Darn small holes. Use block or reweave patches (p. 16) for bigger mends. Main idea in making repairs is to have mends strong and not noticeable.

If the cloth frays easily or tends to stretch, machine stitch around the edges of pieces, particularly old pocket slits, darts, and buttonholes. Stitching not only prevents raveling but helps keep the shape of the pieces.

Wash the cloth if possible. Most suitings and coatings are tubbable, but be sure to handle the cloth carefully. Use plenty of mild suds, and keep the water lukewarm throughout entire washing. A quick change in temperature, either too hot or too cold, will shrink woollens. Squeeze suds through material. Don't rub or you'll mat the surface. Suds several times if necessary. Rinse several times, until the water remains clear. Roll in a terry towel; then hang up to dry in a warm but not hot place.

Look at both sides of the cloth to decide which surface you want to use for the outside of the new garment. The wrong side of the cloth in an old garment often looks brighter and newer and can be used for the right side in a new garment.

Press the material when it is almost dry. Press on the surface you plan to use for wrong side of the new garment. Use a cloth between iron and material, and press with the grain of the cloth so as not to pull pieces out of shape. Be especially careful not to stretch the cut edges.

Curing Spot Troubles

Some old woollen fabrics have spot troubles—nap-worn spots, faded-yarn spots, discolored spots. You may be able to remedy them.

Rub nap-worn spots gently with sandpaper or a wire brush until the finish is as near like the rest of the surface as you can get it. Then shear the nap off evenly.

If some yarns in the fabric have faded, brush lightly with a stiff brush dipped in matching dye, being careful not to soak the cloth. Experiment with the dye first on a sample of the cloth to be sure it matches.

Faded or discolored materials can best be treated by dyeing the entire cloth. For successful dyeing, keep these dye facts in mind:

★ The dyeing process shrinks woollens, but if you follow directions accurately, being sure not to plunge cloth from hot water to cold, the cloth won't shrink too badly.

★ The color in the cloth will affect the color when the material is dyed. So choose your color accordingly. For example, if your material is gray, the final color will be somewhat duller, and you will want to use a brighter dye than you would select if you were dyeing a white cloth.

★ Test a small sample first and determine how much dye you want to use and how long you want the cloth to stay in the dye bath.

You may even want to experiment with special dye colors by mixing dyes. Count on its taking time and patience, and be sure to test the colors by first dyeing samples of the cloth. Don't chance spoiling good material.

Choosing a Pattern

When you choose a pattern for the new garment, keep in mind the number, size, and shape of the pieces of the old garment.

In stores you can ask to see charts showing all the pieces in each pattern. Look at the charts to see if the pattern you want will likely fit the pieces of your old garment. You may have to make piecings or change the style—here's a chance to use your own ideas. Plan changes so they will be in harmony with the rest of the garment, and avoid "that made-over look."

Laying Pattern . . .

Making Piecings

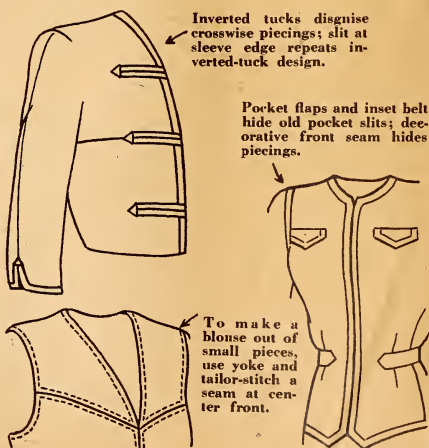
The straight of the goods is marked on pattern pieces with perforations or a heavy inked line. When laying pattern pieces on an old garment, you can place them correctly if you lay these per-

forations or lines on a yarn, check, or stripe either lengthwise or crosswise of the cloth. Follow carefully pattern directions for laying pattern pieces on the grain of the cloth.

Rearrange pattern pieces until you find the best pattern lay-out. Small corners of the seam allowances on a pattern piece may extend beyond the edge of the goods. You can disregard these corners if the cloth has enough seam allowance left to hold after the garment is sewed. As your guide for sewing, mark the seam lines along which you are to stitch.

When you're laying out the pattern, try to arrange it so piecings and repairs fall in a part of the garment where they won't show—in hems, facings, underarm in waist or sleeves. Or you may be able to work piecings into the design. For example, if the old garment pieces are too short for a new waist pattern, a yoke may be devised to take the place of a piecing. Or if the old garment pieces are too narrow for a one-piece coat back, change the pattern to make it a two- or three-piece back.

You can't hide piecing seams in a hard weave cloth; but you can make them so they won't show in soft woollens—particularly woollens with a pattern—by matching the goods exactly, by using tiny stitches that don't show, and by steam-pressing thoroughly. Piece thick coatings that don't fray by pulling together the cut edges with close overhand stitches, steam-press, and brush up the nap on the right side. Strengthen the piecing by sewing a strip of thin ribbon binding over the stitching on the wrong side.



Make-overs from women's coats

BEFORE *Brown fitted coat—vintage of 1929*

AFTER *Short box coat*

Years and years of good wear in this old coat, but the tight sleeves, narrow shoulders, and big collar had made it a fashion outcast.

To change the old to new took a bit of scheming. The pattern back had to be split and seams added to make a three-piece back—because the old coat had been fitted, and all its pieces were narrow.

Then the coat front had to be pieced. So the lap and facing were cut in one and joined to the coat at the center front. For buttonholes, lengthwise slits can be left in the seam.



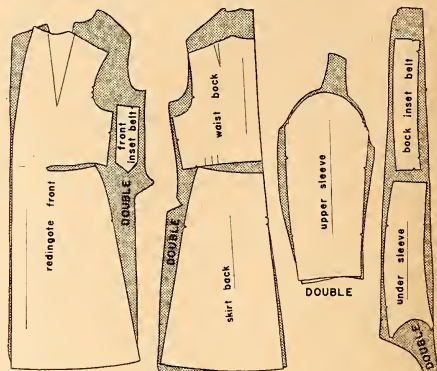
BEFORE *Black broadcloth coat, large size*

AFTER *Redingote to wear with printed frocks*

A top liner in its day—1927 or thereabouts—the old coat had straight lines and one button low on the hip. That meant plenty of good cloth to work with.

Color and weight of the broadcloth called for simple lines in the new outfit—so a redingote was chosen for springtime wear.

The pattern needed some changes to fit the old coat pieces: Skirt back had to be made two-gore; waist back had to be cut in two parts. But the seam of the waist harmonized with the seam of the skirt—so these changes appear to be part of the original plan.



BEFORE *Mixed-color wool coat, brown and chartreuse*

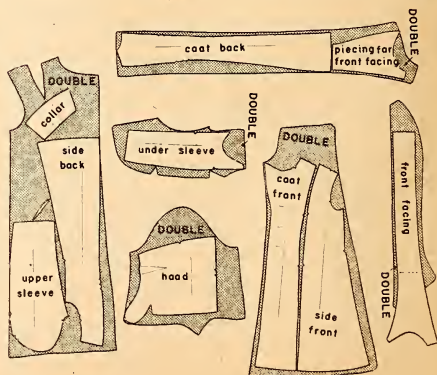
AFTER *Child's winter coat with hood*

Bought in 1935, when styles favored bulky sleeves and chunky buttons, this coat was long ago tucked away because the color had become tiresome to the owner. The coat had good cloth in it.

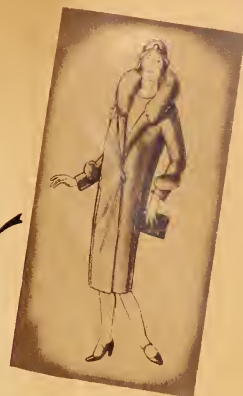
A little girl would enjoy the mixed chartreuse and brown. So after the coat had gone through the usual ripping, washing, and pressing, pattern pieces were laid out on the cloth as illustrated.

To soften the color about the face and the feel of the cloth next to the skin, brown velvet was used for the collar and hood lining.

The coat lining was too light in color for a child's coat, and being a weighted silk, it wouldn't drape well. So darker goods line the new coat.



An old fitted coat gets a new lease on life when made over box style.



Made from a 1927 coat this broadcloth redingote fills a between-season need.

An outfit that's hat and coat in one with trimmings and lining the only cost.





Turned inside out, an old coat of double cloth makes a warm jacket that spares your best coat for spring and autumn.



Two small-size coats used together may work out as well as one of large size.



Father's old coat, turned check side out, provides a sturdy mackinaw for an active boy.



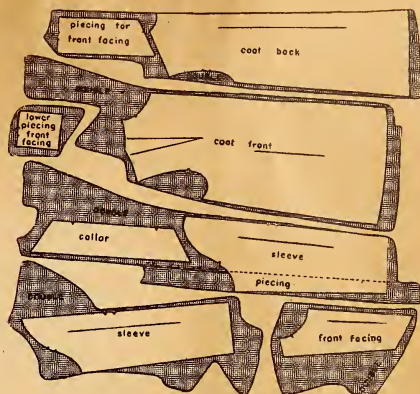
BEFORE *Cloth coat—plain outside, blue-and-white plaid inside*

AFTER *Plaid box coat for a school-girl*

Plaid side out, plain side in—that's the make-over story of this double-cloth coat.

The ripped parts of the old garment had queer shapes, and that meant piecing the sleeves and facings. A type of sleeve with a tailored seam on top solved one piecing problem. Other piecings were made where they wouldn't show.

Double cloth like this is thick but doesn't fray. So the best way to make piecings is to pull cut edges together with close overhand stitches. Reinforce seams on wrong side with ribbon binding, and steam-press.



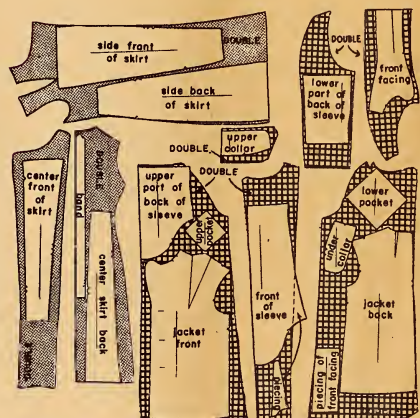
BEFORE *Two spring coats in brown*

AFTER *Jacket-and-skirt ensemble*

Here were two small coats tucked away in the attic where moths could find them. One coat was brown, the other brown-and-white check, just right for making over into a skirt and jacket.

So the coats were ripped, washed, and pressed. The plain brown had no holes but there were plenty in the checked coat where moths had feasted. Best way to mend a patterned cloth of soft wool is with the reweave patch. (See p. 16.) So the crochet hook went to work on the small patches.

Then the sleeves had to be pieced—crosswise and lengthwise. Carefully matched checks make it almost impossible to find piecings and mends.



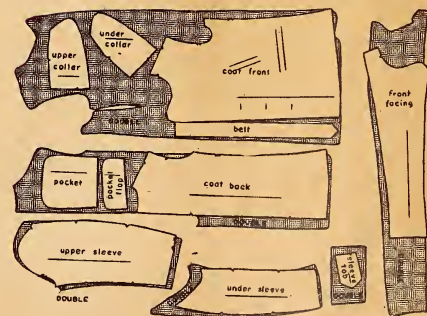
BEFORE *A man's old winter overcoat with belted back*

AFTER *Mackinaw for a schoolboy*

Here's another two-faced cloth that was good for a turn-about. This old, shabby overcoat had a checked outside, worn and snagged, but a plaid inside without a mar. Just right for a boy's mackinaw.

The old overcoat was ripped apart, and because the cloth was so thick, it was sent to a cleaner for washing.

Only extra expense was for cotton lining, buttons, and buckle. Not much to pay for a warm, sturdy jacket that will likely survive the wrestling and other rough-and-tumble play of a 12-year-old.





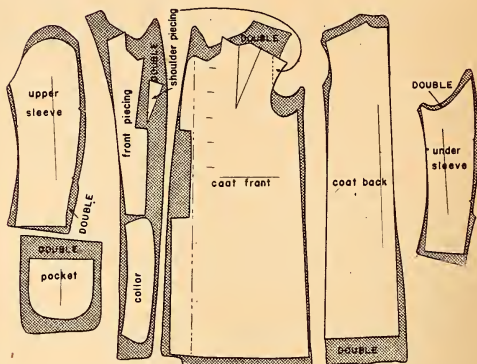
BEFORE *Heavy overcoat with curly nap*

AFTER *Young woman's topcoat*

This old coat had spot troubles. Elbows... back... pocket openings were worn and in some places, white flecks were showing through. Besides, the cloth was stiff. Despite its thickness and weight, it was washed and came out soft and bright.

Worn and flattened spots, brushed with sandpaper, fluffed up so as to be hardly noticeable. Dark-blue dye, brushed lightly over the white flecks, finished the job of giving new life to the old cloth.

Now, here's a good coat to wear over suits and woolen dresses on cold days.



BEFORE *Raglan-sleeve topcoat*

AFTER *Snow suit for a 3-year-old*

A discouraging sight, this old coat: Soiled, stained along one side of the front, and moth-eaten through the pockets. But a different story it was after the ripped coat had been washed in several suds, rinsed many times, and pressed. Then, with the moth holes mended, the cloth looked bright and fresh.

To keep wrists and ankles snug against snow and winter cold, the new snow suit was made with knitted bands at sleeves and pants legs. Usually notion counters have these bands, but they can be made from old sweaters or bathing suits. And the gayer they are, the better.



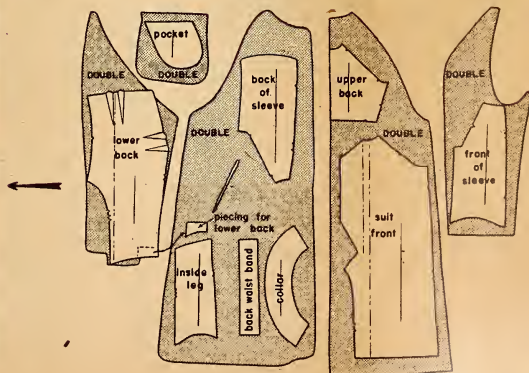
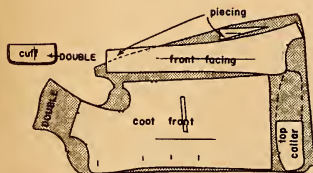
BEFORE Wool overcoat of covert cloth

AFTER Boy's overcoat—school or best

Old wool but good wool, all this cloth needed was the usual cleaning and turning.

Chief problems were the underarm darts and old pocket slits that couldn't be avoided in the cutting.

The darts were let out as far as possible and resealed, and new pockets were made in the old pocket slits. Of course, a man's pocket is larger than a boy's—so part of the old slits had to be seamed. But that didn't matter because the seams could be hidden by the rantering stitch. (See p. 16.)



Make-overs from suits

BEFORE *Man's serge suit—worn and shiny*

AFTER *Street dress—trim and tailored*

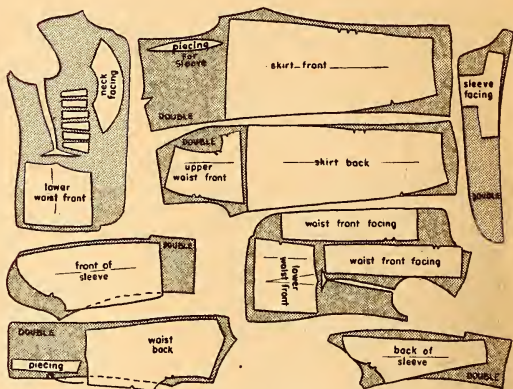


Will a man's suit make over into a dress? This trim outfit is the answer although it called for a bit of camouflage art.

The waist front had to be pieced crosswise. So piecings were made in line with the inverted tucks, and the seams, extending from ends of tucks to armholes, were hidden by the rantering stitch. (See p. 16.)

A slit at the lower edge of the sleeve to match the tucks at waist front, and a seam running from the slit to the shoulder give the sleeve piecings a "meant-to-be" look.

The scrap bag furnished round black braid for the plaited belt. Dickies of different styles and different colors offer all sorts of chance for change.



BEFORE *Soft gray-wool suit*

AFTER *School dress for a young girl*



From good parts of men's old shirts, make a variety of dickies and a back shield.

Fine wool, soft to the skin, but firm enough to be durable, is just about ideal for a small girl's dress. Only fault in the old suit was its color—a bit drab for a child.

Here the button box came in handy, producing bright-blue buttons to adorn the dress front. A blue collar can add still more color to the frock.

Tucks and flat tailoring make pressing easy. A wide hem that can be let down takes care of the growing-girl problem.

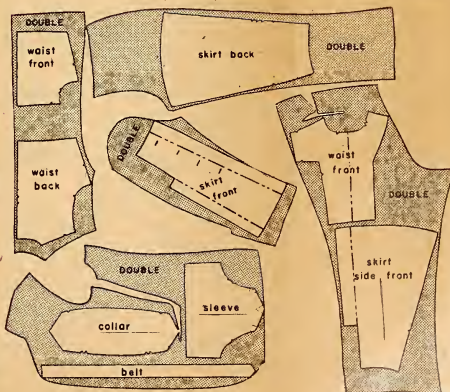
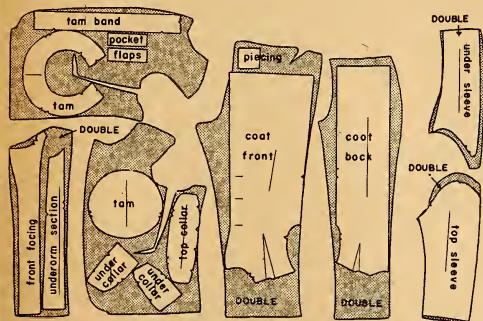
BEFORE *Gray woolen homespun suit*

AFTER *Chesterfield and tam to match*

Yellow with age was the old suit and no amount of dry-cleaning would restore the clear gray color. So a tubbing seemed in order with lots of mild suds and plenty of rinse water.

Brightened, and with most of the yellowish stain gone, the old suit had enough cloth for a schoolgirl's coat and tam.

To add a spot of gay color to the outfit, a scarf was made from a man's discarded but still-attractive tie.



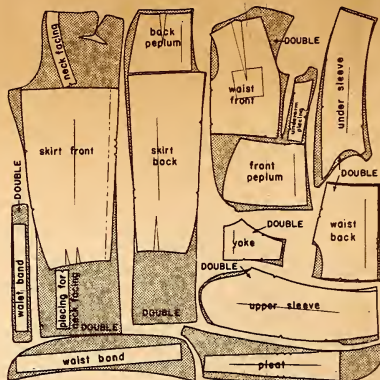
BEFORE *Man's suit with belted back and patch pockets*

AFTER *Suit dress for street wear*

Man-tailored or dressmaker style—which shall the new suit be? Texture of the cloth and cut of the old suit coat are the best answers to that question.

This old suit had a belted back, patch pockets, and soft wool, lending itself best to a peplum-style jacket with an inset belt.

A four-gore skirt is about the only style that can be made from one pair of trousers; but a pleat set in at the center front adds to the grace and comfort of this skirt.



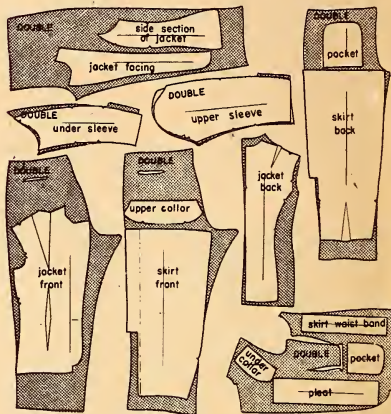
BEFORE *Two-trouser suit of gray green*

AFTER *Tailored suit for a war worker*

When a service lad went off to war, he left this suit behind. Seemed likely enough he wouldn't fit the old suit when he came back, and besides one pair of trousers had thin spots in the knees. All good reasons for a make-over.

The gray-green cloth had a shadowy plaid of wine color, and since the old suit was the two-trouser kind, there was enough goods to do a matching job of the plaid:

Large pattern pieces, as skirt, gores and jacket fronts, were cut from the trousers, leaving the coat for smaller pieces; and they could be laid on the cloth in such a way as to avoid the old pocket slits.



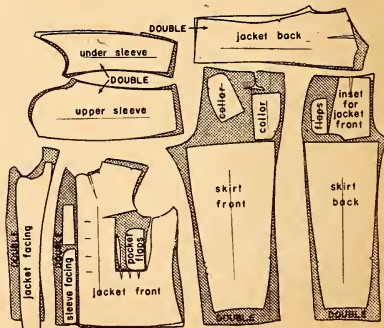
BEFORE *Brown serge suit—soiled and shiny, small in size*

AFTER *Tailored suit for all-round wear*

Shine and soil disappeared in the usual way—by tubbing and turning. But the suit had other make-over problems—big ones.

First, the small size of the suit meant little cloth. Then, the coat, when ripped, had three pocket slits and deep waist darts that had been trimmed off. No way to dodge them in cutting. So here was a piecing job to do.

Large blocks of cloth set in on each side of the jacket seemed the best solution. Pocket flaps and ranter stitch (see p. 16) hide piecing seams.





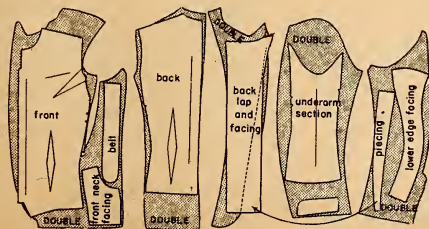
The new suit may be dressmaker style with light feminine touches when made over from an old suit of soft wool with belted back and patch pockets.



Big pockets highlight the jacket . . . a kick pleat adds fullness to the skirt . . . the shadowy plaid is well matched—all because the old suit had two pairs of trousers.



Made from an old coat that the rag bag would have claimed in less thrifty days, this jerkin shows ways of disguising piecings: A decorative seam at center front, an opening at center back, a belt and pocket flaps to cover old pocket slits. Good for a cold office on nippy days.

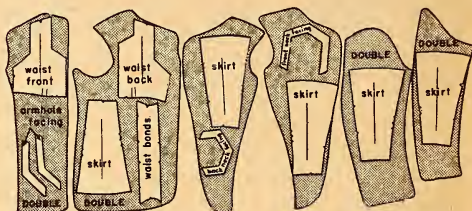




BEFORE *Beige sport coat with patch pockets*

AFTER *Dark-green jumper for a schoolgirl*

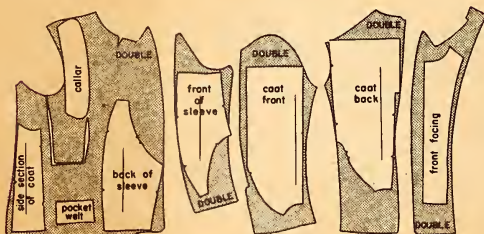
Sun, dye pot, and scissors did the main work of making the old look new. The sport coat had faded badly, leaving dark blotches under the patch pockets. Washing, bleaching in the sun, dyeing dark green helped, but didn't rid the cloth of the dark spots. Problem was finally solved by laying pattern pieces so dark patches were broken up in cutting and don't show in new jumper.



BEFORE *Faded gabardine suit coat*

AFTER *Raglan-sleeve topcoat for a little boy*

No big problem here. Sunlight had faded the color of the old coat to a dusty blue, but the gabardine inside was bright and fresh without a worn spot—just right for turning. Only expense was for a new lining, a small sum for a coat that will probably last 2 years.





BEFORE *A pair of navy-blue trousers—shiny and threadbare*

AFTER *A small boy's pants*

In the history of make-overs this is the oldest story of all: Making a pair of small boy's pants from father's outworn trousers.

And these trousers were really worn, with holes in the knees and seat, and threadbare edges; yet they had enough strong cloth for the small pants.

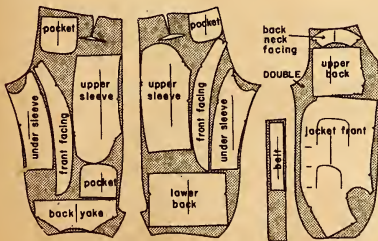
To complete the outfit, a blouse was made from the good parts of an old striped shirt.



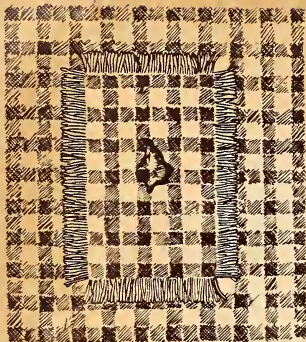
BEFORE *Outgrown herringbone knickers*

AFTER *All-occasion jacket for a young lad*

Here was good wool except for slight moth damage. When darned, the mended holes were lost to sight in the pattern of the cloth. The new sleeve pattern wouldn't fit just right into the old garment pieces. Only way to solve the problem was to cut the under part of sleeves slightly off grain—not desirable, but in this case better than to waste good cloth.



Reweave Patch



When a hole or a close group of holes would make a darn difficult or when a darn would show too much, apply a patch over the hole. This patch, put on from the right side of the material, is suitable only for material that is rather coarsely woven.

On the material to be patched, mark with four pins a square or rectangle the size of the patch you need.

1. Clip out only one yarn, between pins, on each side of the square or rectangle. Pull one yarn out in each direction, leaving the outline of the patch you want to make.

2. Cut a matched patch piece about 1 inch larger all around than this space. Be sure the lengthwise yarns of the patch match with the lengthwise yarns of the suiting. Ravel out yarns from each

side until the patch piece is an exact fit. Lay the matched patch on top of the hole on the right side of the material. Pin it in place.

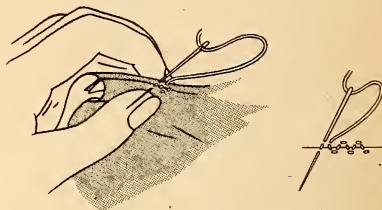
3. From the wrong side of the material, pull the raveled yarns through to the wrong side with a small crochet hook. Draw the raveled yarns through the spaces left by the pulled-out yarns. Do this all around until the patch sets smoothly over the damaged spot.

4. With needle and thread take little hemming stitches on the wrong side of the patch along the line where the yarns have been pulled through. This holds the patch in place. Steam-press.

Rantering Stitch

The rantering stitch may be used on soft woollens to hide mends and piecings that are not a part of the design. Here's how you use the stitch:

On the wrong side of the garment, press open the seam of the piecing or mend. Turn garment to the right side. Pinch the seam line on the right side between the thumb and forefinger and, using a fine needle and sewing thread, stitch back and forth over the seam line in a V direction. Be careful to pick up only one yarn on each side of the seam line. Pull the thread up close. Then press.



OTHER BULLETINS ON CLOTHING AND TEXTILES AVAILABLE FROM THE U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

ABC's of Mending. Farmers' Bul. 1925.
Mending Men's Suits. Misc. Pub. 482.
Making a Dress at Home. Farmers' Bul. 1954.

Coat Making at Home. Farmers' Bul. 1894.
Stain Removal from Fabrics. Farmers' Bul. 1474.
Take Care of the Wool You Have. AWI-26.

This publication supersedes Leaflet No. 230,
Make-overs from Men's Suits.

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